

How God's Kingdom Grows

Lesson 15: Challenges To Kingdom Growth, Part 3

Up to this point, we have observed several things that are challenging the growth of God's kingdom. While Satan would love to stop and defeat the kingdom of God completely, he will never accomplish this. However, he can and often does limit the growth of God's kingdom by throwing many obstacles in front of it. Thankfully, God always provides the answers to the challenges Satan puts in front of God's kingdom if we will apply them.

1) Traditionalism. The Scriptures describe two possibilities as to where a belief or practice may come from: From God or people (Matthew 21:25). Therefore, some traditions come from God and must be observed and taught in order to please God (2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:6). However, some traditions come from people (Matthew 15:1-2). Yet, God's kingdom can be held back in a couple of ways by those who place too much trust in human traditions. For one, some human traditions result in people disobeying God (Matthew 15:3-9). Then, some human traditions may be perfectly authorized by God but bound to a point of hindering the growth of the kingdom (making the tradition the focus rather than God's true mission).

God's people must be willing to evaluate everything they do and believe – both things that are individual in nature and things that pertain to a local church (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22). Certainly, the traditions that cause God's word to be violated and that are unauthorized by God must be rejected! However, even the human traditions that are authorized must also be carefully and regularly considered concerning their effectiveness in God's kingdom. For, the focus must be to allow the seed of God's kingdom to be as effective as possible. We must carefully guard against imposing a system of traditions and concepts that become the standard rather than simply pursuing God's standard and purposes (Romans 10:1-3).

2) Distraction. There are constant challenges of getting distracted by the things of this world and missing the real point of God's kingdom. Perhaps this is what happened to much of the church in Sardis (Revelation 3:1-6). They were still evidently meeting as a church and doing some things churches do. Others even recognized them as being alive. But, most of them were dead. Then, Christ urged them to be alert! After all, Satan will often try to sow the seeds of distraction among those who have become part of God's kingdom so they will not produce any mature fruit for Christ (Mark 4:18-19).

Jesus warned people about getting distracted with the things of this world – even as it concerned the worries about the necessities of life (Matthew 6:19-34). Ultimately, His people are to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (v. 33). While we all live in this world, we must not consider ourselves to be of this world (John 15:18-19). Our affections must be changed so that they now reside in Heaven (Colossians 3:1-4). Two pictures describing Christians in Scripture should help us to stay focused. The first is that we must consider ourselves to be living as exiles/strangers in a foreign land (1 Peter 1:17; 2:11-12). As such, we do not view this world as our homes so as to become distracted by the things of this world. The second is that we must consider ourselves to be living as soldiers fighting in Christ's army (2 Timothy 2:3-4). As such, we must not view ourselves as civilians (i.e. those of the world) who are not concerned about the mission of Christ's kingdom!

3) Mission drift. Just because citizens of God's kingdom embrace God's mission and are being diligent in their work to aid in the growth of God's kingdom at one time *does not* guarantee this will always continue! For example, consider the church in Ephesus. The book of Acts demonstrates how the church at Ephesus began and grew through difficult

circumstances (Acts 18:24-19:41). From Ephesus, the gospel spread throughout the province of Asia (Acts 19:8-10). This congregation even had elders shepherding them (Acts 20:17-38). Paul also sent a letter to them (Ephesians) and Timothy to help them for a time (1 Timothy 1:3). Yet, by the time of Revelation, this congregation was doing many good things; yet without the love that should have motivated them (Revelation 2:1-7). In the same way, individual Christians and churches can do some good things, but drift from the true love and fervor they should have for Christ!

Christians are warned about drifting away (Hebrews 2:1)! This implies, though, that failing to be what God desires may not happen all at once. Instead, it often happens gradually to the point it is almost unnoticeable unless you are actively looking for it. Therefore, God's people must pay attention all the more to what we have heard! Always be and hungering and thirsting for God, zealous for good works. For, going through the motions of religious service to Christ simply must not be good enough for God's people! After all, there is a harvest of souls throughout this world who desperately need the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 9:35-38).

The seed of the gospel contains all that is necessary for the growth of God's kingdom (Mark 4:30-32)! While there are many things we do not and cannot understand about how the seed grows and does its work (Mark 4:26-29), there are clearly ways that we can hinder it (Mark 4:3-9, 13-20). Therefore, we must diligently evaluate ourselves to identify the challenges that present themselves to kingdom growth and do what we can do to overcome them all!

Discipleship Questions

(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Teaching: What did you learn from this lesson?

Rebuking: What are some ways this lesson challenges you to live differently?

Correction: How does this lesson help you make positive changes for Christ?

Training & Equipping: How can you apply this lesson to be trained and equipped in God's service?